

# The Well-Being of LGBTQ+ Youth in Child Welfare



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# BEFORE WE DIVE IN, LET'S TALK ABOUT TERMS:

**SOGIE\*:** Everyone has a SOGIE

**VS.**

**LGBTQ-GE +\* :** Refers to a particular population

- What does the “+” stand for?
- Remember that letters are not as important as making sure you are respecting every individual

\*Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression

\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning/Queer-Gender Expansive

## TERMS

- Transgender Female: Sex assigned at birth: male, identifies as female.
  - Transgender male: Sex assigned at birth: female, identifies as male.
  - Cisgender: Sex assigned at birth matches a person's gender identity.
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- Gender Expansive (GE): A wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system (a.k.a. gender nonconforming, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, gender awesome etc.).



# BINARY GENDER ABACUS



**ANATOMY**



**GENDER IDENTITY**



**GENDER EXPRESSION**



**SEXUAL/ROMANTIC ATTRACTION**

Genitals

A sense of oneself

A person's behavior,  
mannerisms, appearance

The Butterflies

“Binary notions of gender, biology and sexual orientation exclude large swaths of human diversity. This diversity can be better understood by using spectrum-based models. Spectra make room for anyone whose experiences do not narrowly fit into binary choices such as man/woman, feminine/masculine or straight/gay.” Joel Baum & Kim Westheimer

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 1.2 million people living in the US identify as nonbinary, according to a [new study by the Williams Institute](#) at UCLA School of Law.





# Gender Galaxy

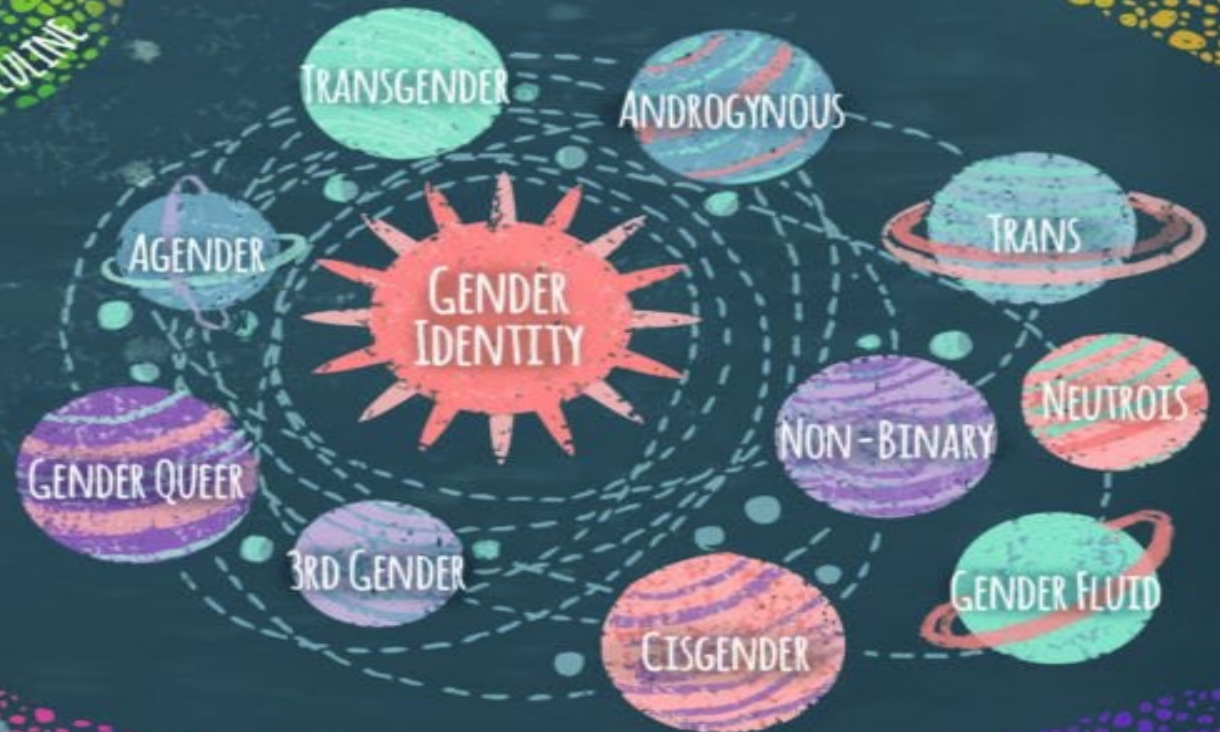
TWO SPIRIT  
GALAXY



SEXUALITY  
GALAXY



FEMININE  
GENDER EXPRESSION - INFINITE POSSIBILITIES  
MASCULINE



ADD YOUR OWN PLANET (COMET OR MOON)!  
MAKE YOUR OWN SOLAR SYSTEM OR GALAXY!



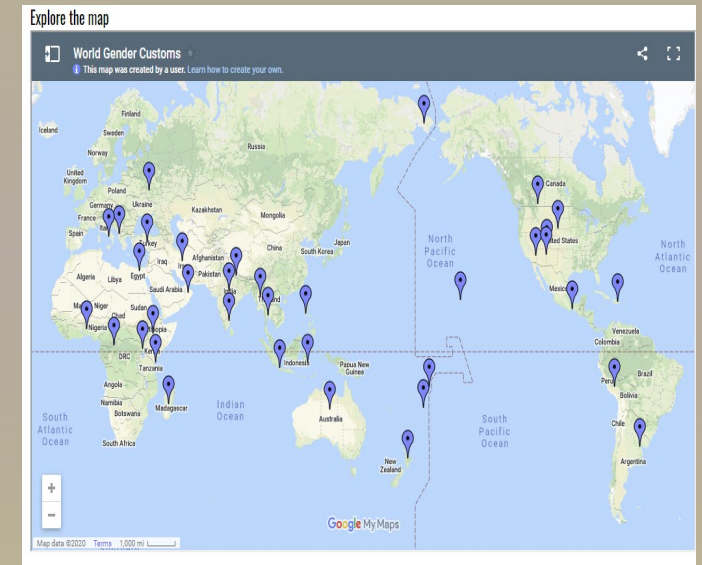
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# Gender & Colonialism

- On nearly every continent, and for all recorded history, thriving cultures have recognized, revered, and integrated more than two genders. hundreds of distinct societies around the globe have their own long-established traditions for third, fourth, fifth, or more genders.
- Terms such as “transgender” and “gay” are strictly new constructs that assume three things: that there are only two sexes (male/female), two sexualities (gay/straight), and only two genders (man/woman).
- Most Western societies have no direct correlation for this tradition, nor for the many other communities without strict either/or conceptions of sex, sexuality, and gender. Worldwide, the sheer variety of gender expression is almost limitless.

Let's take a moment to think of how “genderized” the Western culture is...



[https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits\\_map-html/](https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/)

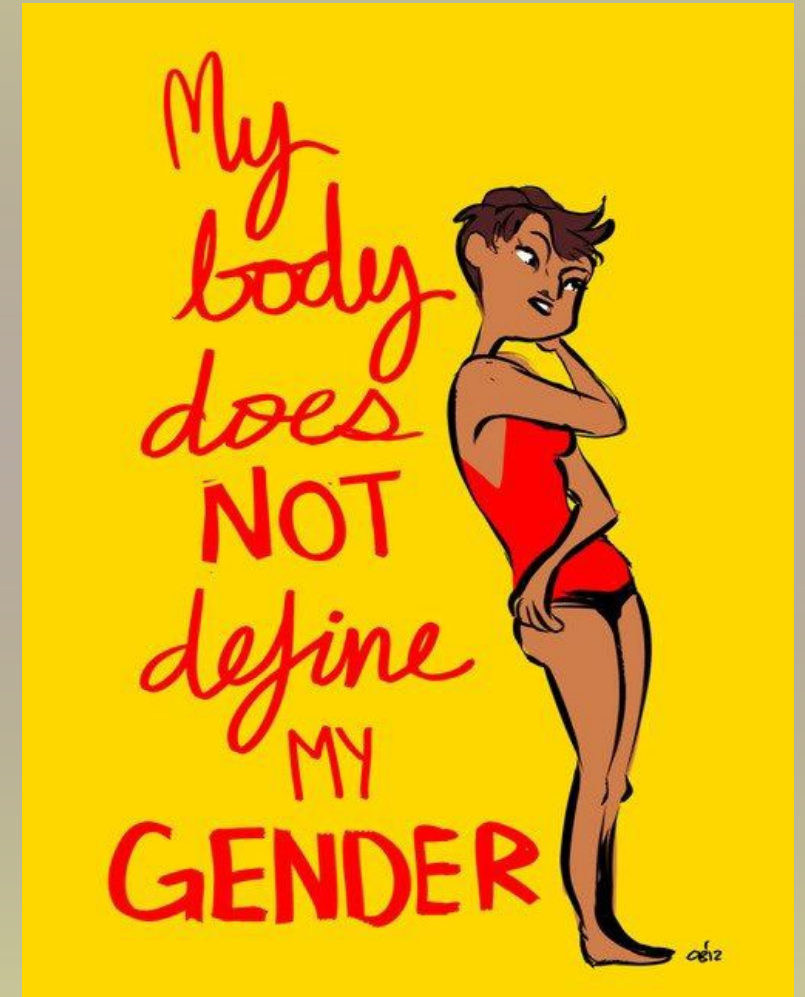


# Nonbinary Identities

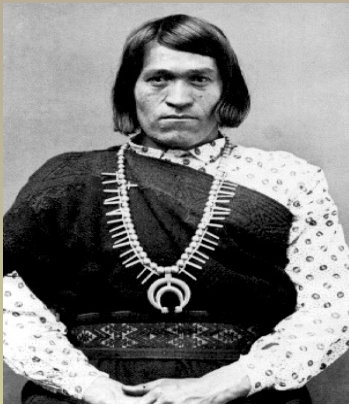
Non-binary gender is any gender that isn't exclusively male or female.

Non-binary people may feel some mix of both male and female, somewhere in between, or something completely different, or neither.

Other terms that are like 'non-binary' are genderqueer, gender expansive, gender nonconforming, and gender awesome.



# The Nonbinary “Look”



What do you notice?

# The Bi Umbrella

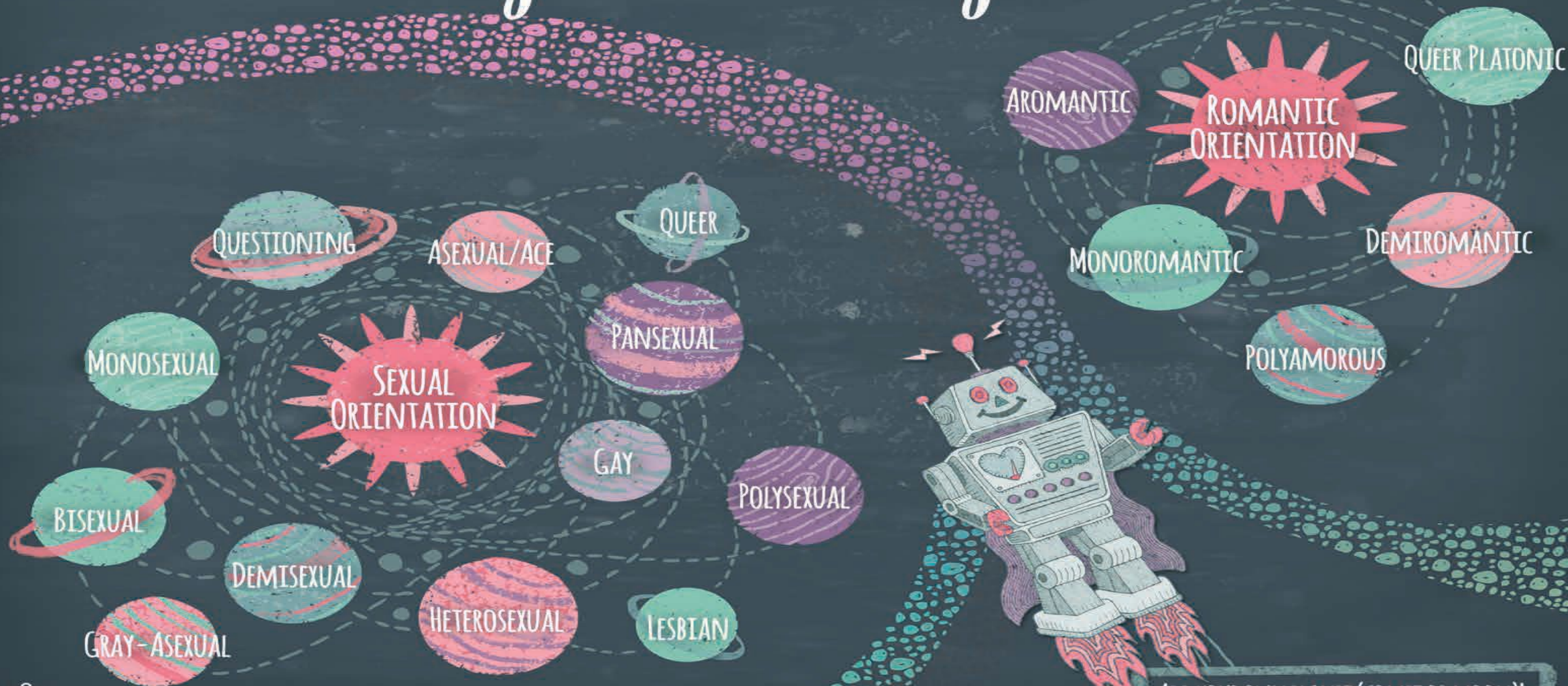




# Sexuality Galaxy

TWO SPIRIT  
GALAXY

GENDER  
GALAXY



Action Canada  
for Sexual Health & Rights

ADD YOUR OWN PLANET (COMET OR MOON)!  
MAKE YOUR OWN SOLAR SYSTEM OR GALAXY!



# WHY THIS MATTERS

Nationwide: 34%  
of youth in the  
child welfare  
system identify as  
LGBTQ+  
(1 in 3!)



Approx. 60% of  
these youth are  
youth of color

One in five young  
people in U.S.  
juvenile justice  
facilities identify  
as LGBTQ.



85% of these  
individuals are  
youth of color

Of the 1.6 million  
youth who are  
homeless in the  
US, close to 50%  
identify as  
LGBTQ+



Disproportionally  
represented in the  
CSEC population  
due to high level  
of homelessness



The 2022 Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health represents experiences of more than 34,000 LGBTQ youth across the U.S. Ages 13 to 17. The following data was taken directly from the survey:

Nearly 18% of LGBTQ respondents attempted suicide in the past twelve months, including more than 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth.

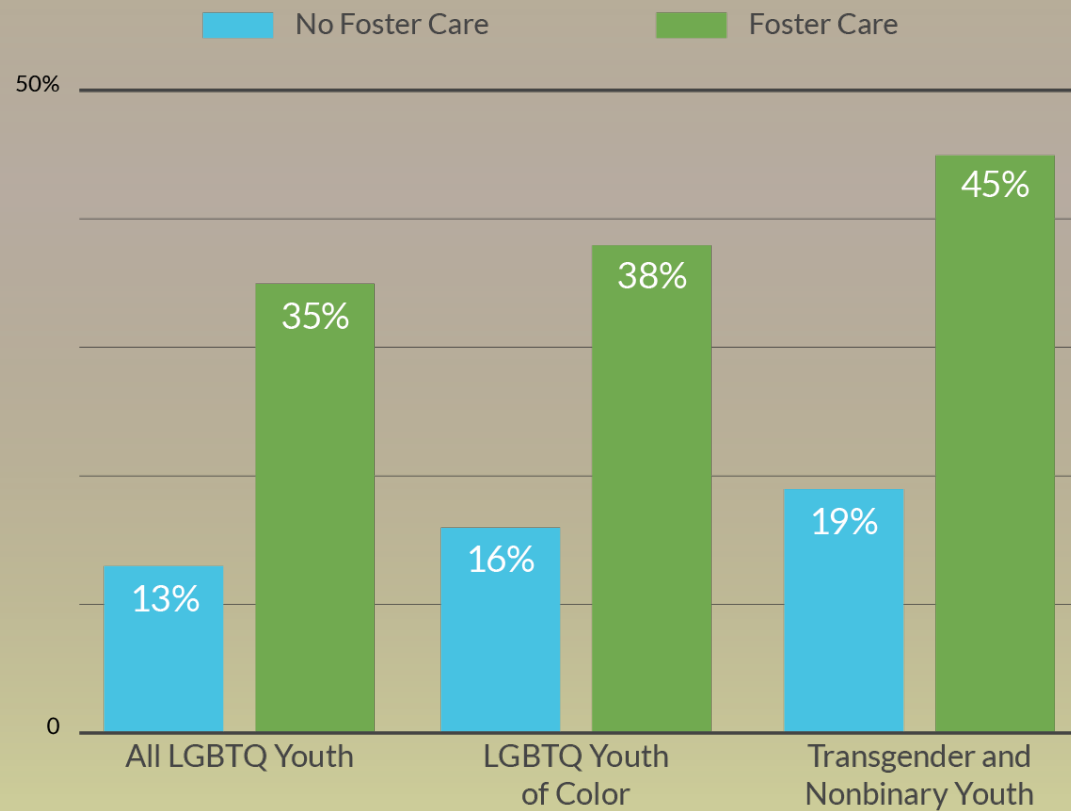
50% of LGBTQ youth and 53% of transgender and nonbinary youth report having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months.

28% of LGBTQ youth who experienced housing instability reported a suicide attempt in the past year.

Nearly 60% of transgender and nonbinary youth didn't receive wanted mental health care due to concerns related to the LGBTQ competence of providers.

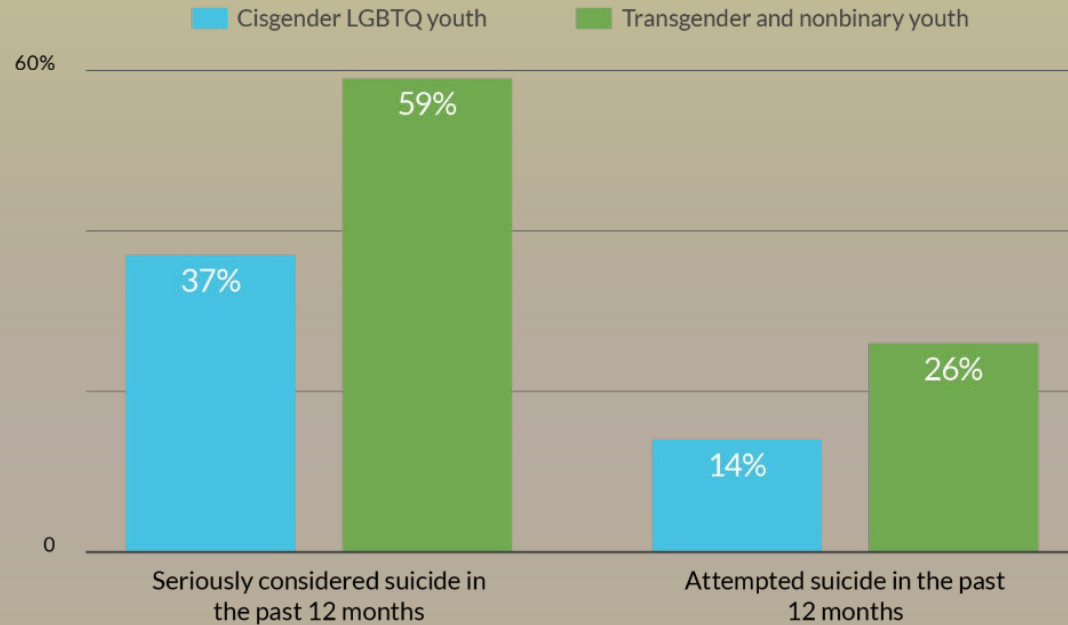
# Research Brief: LGBTQ Youth with a History of Foster Care

## Association between Being in Foster Care and Attempting Suicide in the Past Year



LGBTQ+ youth with a history of foster care are 3x more likely to have attempted suicide

## Suicide Among Black LGBTQ Youth: Gender Identity



Nearly **1 in 4** Black LGBTQ youth in foster care **reported a suicide attempt** in the past year

12% of white youth attempted suicide compared to:  
17% of multiracial youth,  
16% of Latinx youth,  
12% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth  
20% Middle Eastern/Northern African  
21% of Native/Indigenous youth,



## IN CONTRAST:

Transgender and nonbinary youth who report having their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives attempted suicide at **half the rate** of those who did not have their pronouns respected.

Transgender and nonbinary youth with access to binders, shapewear, and gender-affirming clothing reported lower rates of attempting suicide in the past year compared to transgender and nonbinary youth without access (14% compared to 26%).

Teens who perceived parental support regarding gender identity were 93% less likely to attempt suicide than youth who did not perceive parents as supportive.

# EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ+ IN FOSTER CARE

## VICTIMIZED

- LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to report being treated poorly as their non-LGBTQ peers while in care.

## DISPLACED

- 78% of youth removed or run away from placement because of hostility to sexual orientation or gender identity and they do not find families for them.
- LGBTQ youth have a greater average number of placements than their non-LGBTQ peers.
- LGBTQ youth are more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to be placed in congregate care, including group homes.

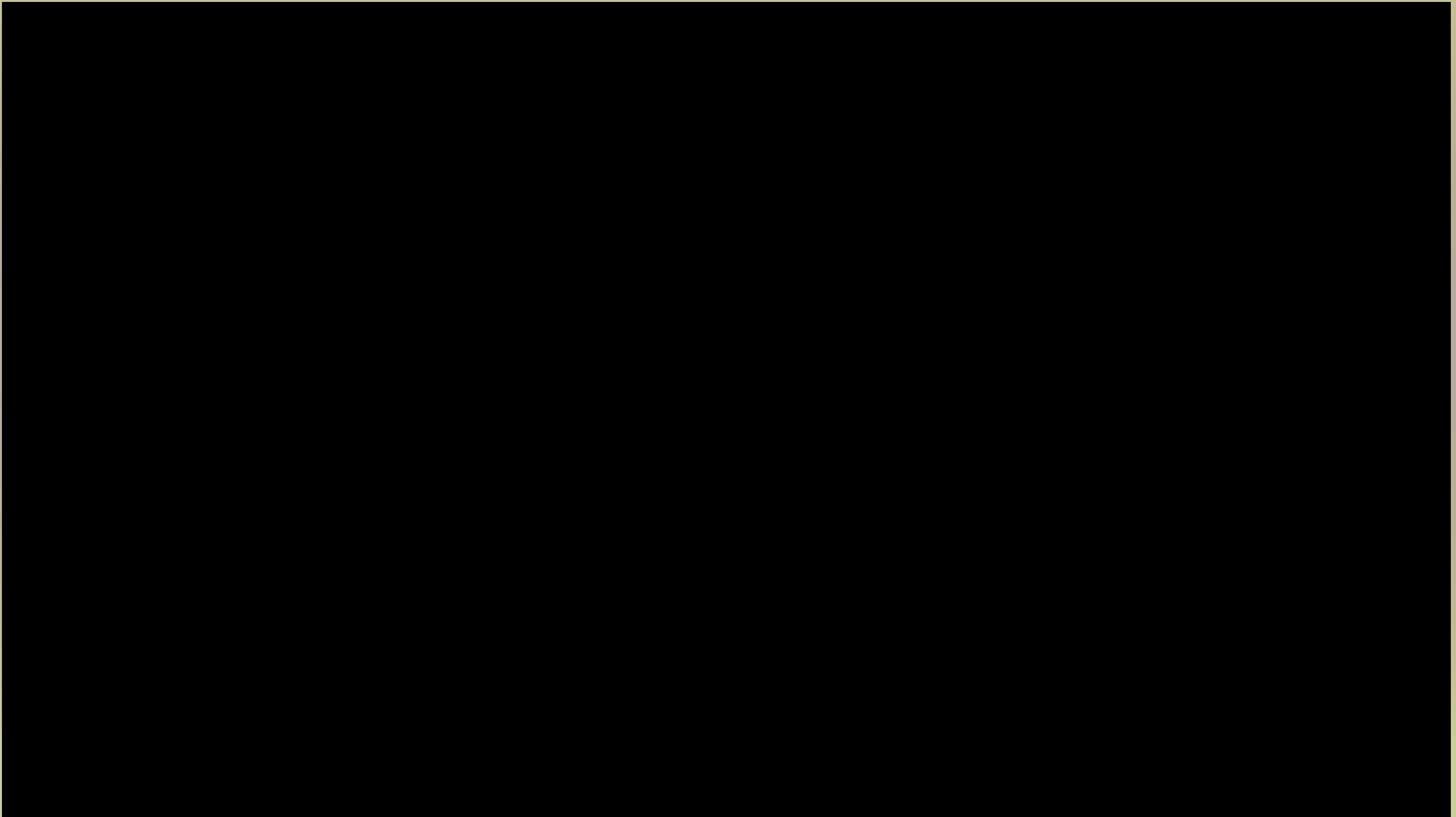
## SEGREGATED

- They are segregated from other youth of same sex.

## PUNISHED

- Punished for expressing sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Not allowed to participate in programming.

## VIDEO: Hearing from LGBTQ+ and GE Foster Youth - Project Flare

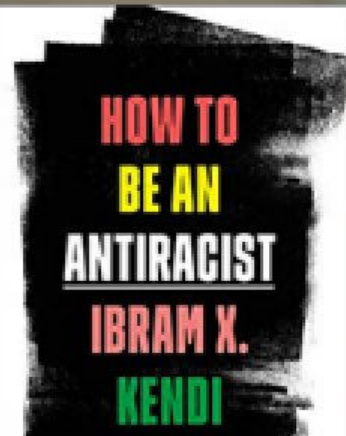


# The Intersection of SOGIE & RACE

“It’s pretty much impossible to be an antiracist and also be homophobic”

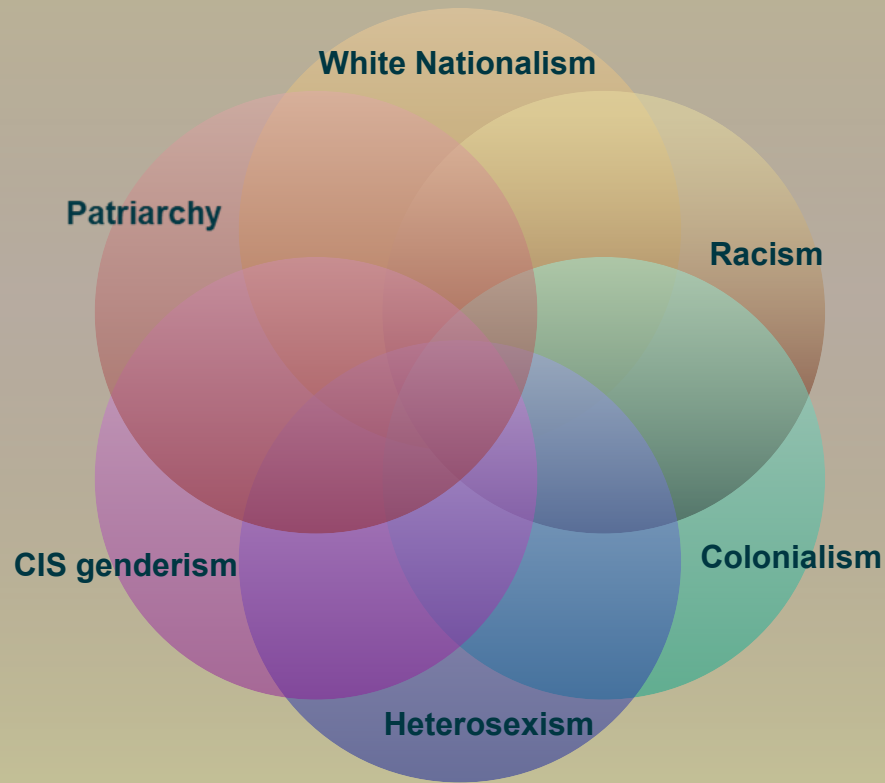
-Ibram X. Kendi

“How to Be an Antiracist”



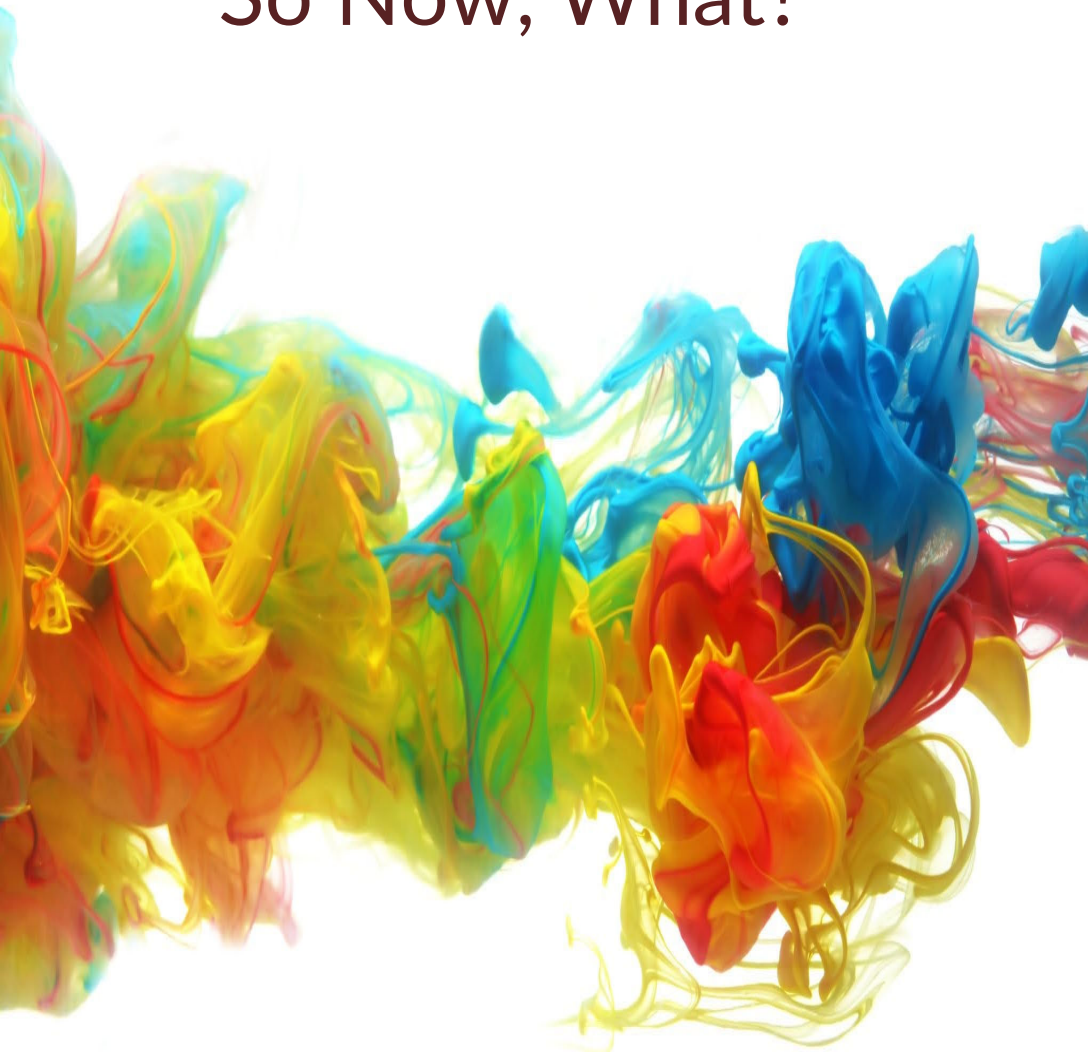


# Recognizing Barriers to Permanency in Child Welfare



- Child welfare systems take away Black and Brown children at a disproportionately higher rate compared to White children and are then reluctant to send them home.
- Structural racism and LGBTQ stigma increase the risk that LGBTQ youth of color will enter these systems.
- The child welfare systems treat youth of colors differently than white youth (diagnosis, medication, culturally relevant responses, criminalizing families of color etc.).
- Once in the system, LGBTQ youth of color tend to remain longer, and face greater risk of discrimination and violence compared to their peers.
- Historically, LGBTQ+ children who left their first family due to not being accepted were rarely given the opportunity and support to reconnect with their family. Instead, they got “saved” by the system (shelters, group homes etc.).

# So Now, What?



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Why can't LGBTQ+ youth have permanency plans that involves their families and their communities?

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Families love their children and are their own experts.

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The Youth Acceptance Project is one intervention that helps families reunify or better yet, prevent disruption in the first place.

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## Families can and DO change!

There's no  
place like home:

# — The Youth Acceptance Project



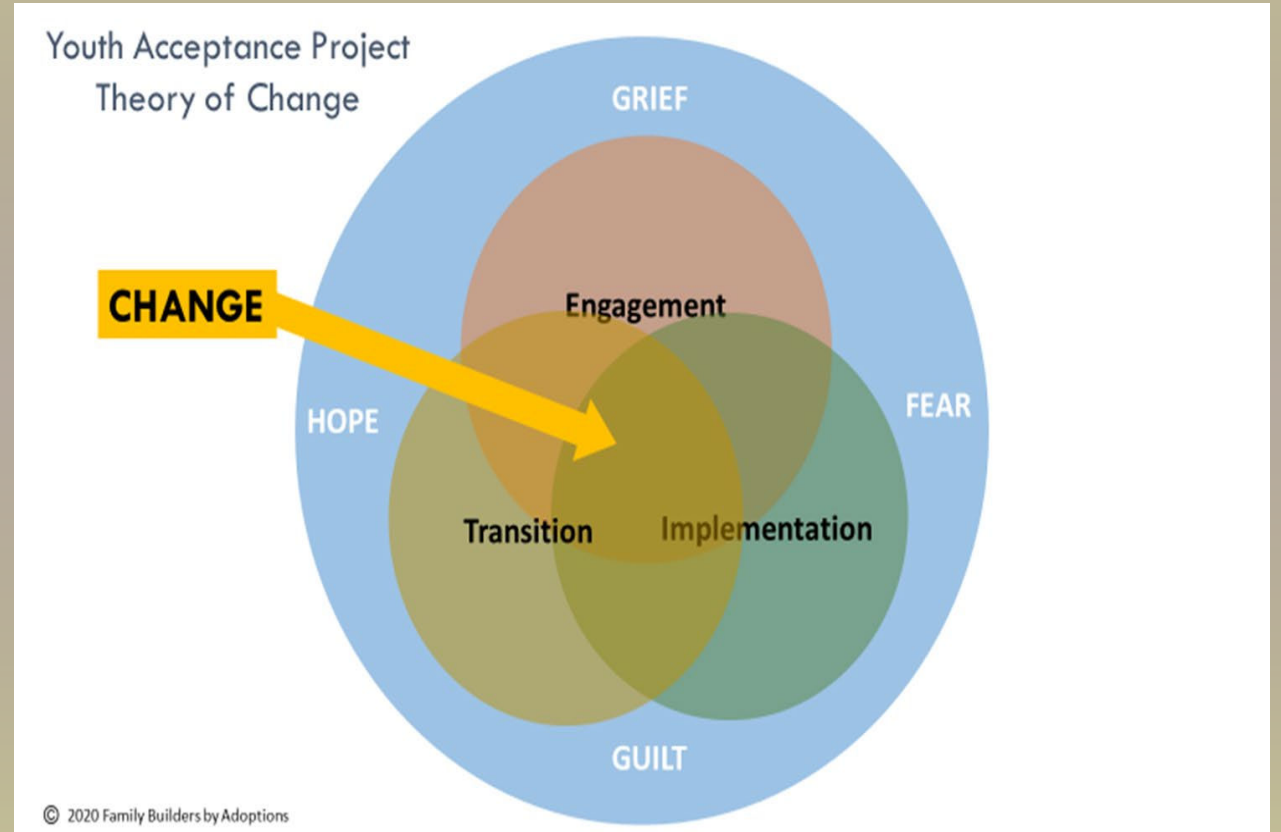
# WHAT IS THE YOUTH ACCEPTANCE PROJECT?

- YAP is a clinical intervention that was developed by Family Builders in Oakland to meet the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth and their families whether in out of home care or still with their families.
- It is a distinct solution-focused, strength-based and trauma informed family-engagement intervention seeped in cultural humility for caregivers struggling to affirm their LGBTQ+ youth.
- The goal of YAP is family preservation, family reunification, and thus, improving permanency outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth. (Parental support is essential as a protective factor).



# YAP Theory of Change

Early, sensitive engagement and intervention with families can support change that make a significant impact on a family's functioning and a lasting impact on the overall wellness of LGBTQ+ youth.



# Youth Acceptance Project Guiding Principles

- Variations of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex are part of the normal spectrum of human diversity.
- The increased risks faced by LGBTQ-T+GE-I youth are not inherent to their identities, but stem from the stresses of prejudice, discrimination, rejection and mistreatment.
- Like all children, LGBTQ-T+GE-I children thrive and succeed when their families, schools and communities support and nurture their evolving identities.
- Efforts to change a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity are ineffective, unnecessary and harmful.
- A young person's SOGIE cannot be understood separately from their race, ethnicity, class, ability or immigration status, which together confer a mix of disadvantage and privilege that impacts their experiences, opportunities and health status.
- Regardless of their personal beliefs, the employees and contractors of public systems of care are legally and ethically required to treat LGBTQ-T+GE-I young people equitably and respectfully (The “do no harm” principle)
- **With support and education, families can and do change.**

# WHAT DO YAP Social Workers do?

## Work

Work directly with parents or caregivers and youth to provide emotional support and improve communication.

## Listen

We listen, validate, and help process parents' feelings away from their children.

## Lean In

The family is their own expert. We lean into religion, culture and race. We meet the family where they are at.

## Provide

Provide accurate information about SOGIE\* to family members to dispel myths and increase understanding.

## Attend

Attend LGBTQ+ community meetings with parents.  
Go to schools to support caregivers and youth.

## Refer

Refer parents and youth to appropriate resources for medical assessments (when applicable).

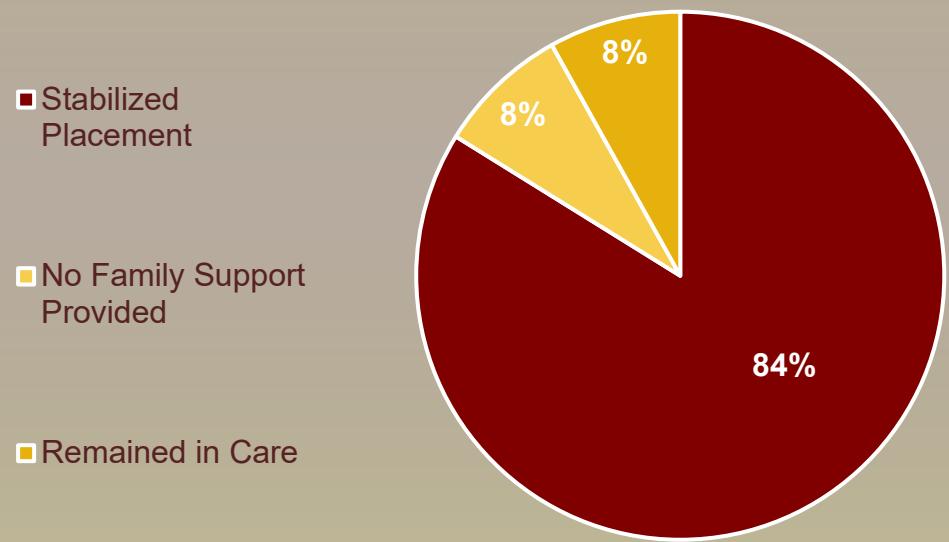
## Help

Help teams make decisions about permanency planning and maintaining healthy contact with first families

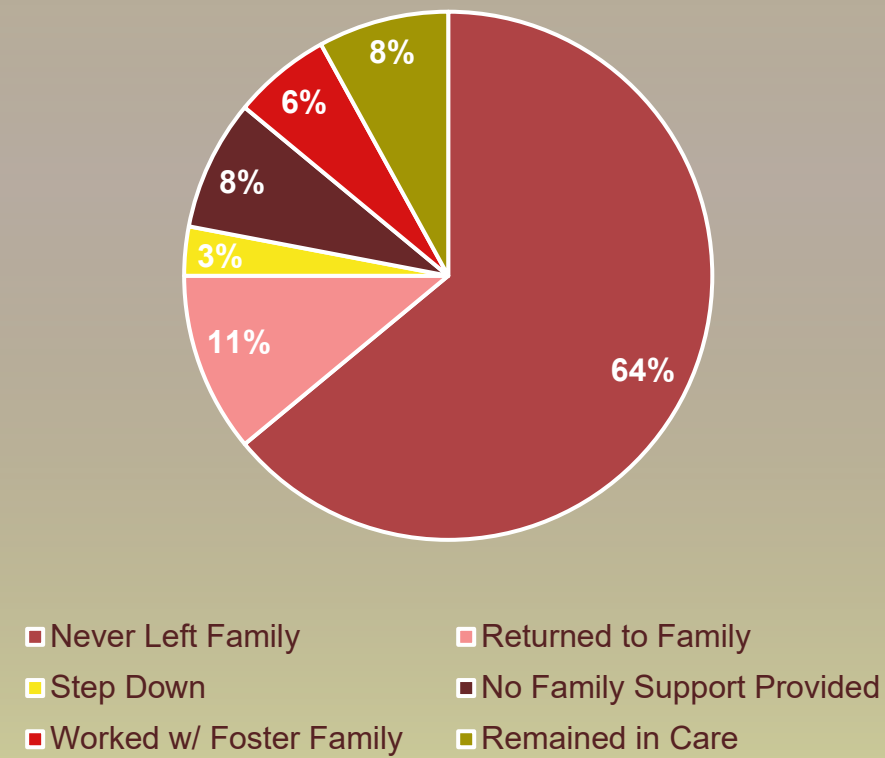
When needed, we provide training to county, foster homes and group home staff.

# WHAT WE ARE SEEING

Placement Stabilization



Return to Families

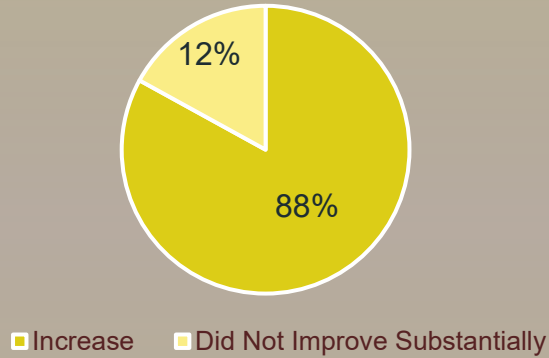




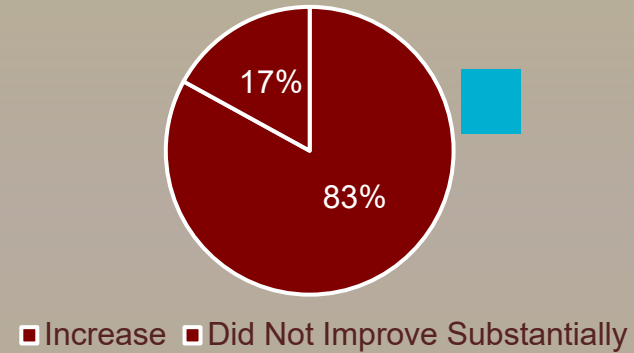
## Case Results from the Caregiver Affirmation Abacus (2018-2021)

The data presented here are results from Family Builders' Caregiver Affirmation Abacus assessment. This is a tool intended to measure the Youth Acceptance Project's impact on a caregiver's affirmation of their youth's identity over time. The goal is that increased affirmation of a youth's sexual orientation, gender identity and expression will have a positive impact on the youth's wellbeing and families remaining intact.

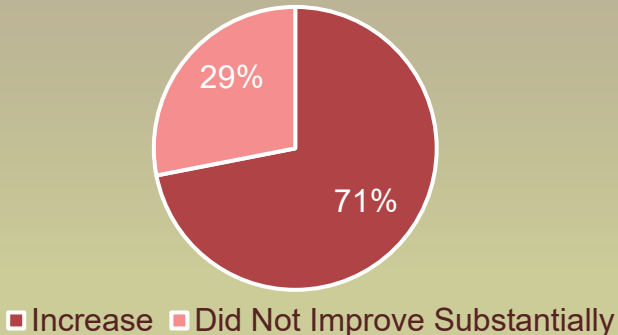
### Caregiver Affirmation



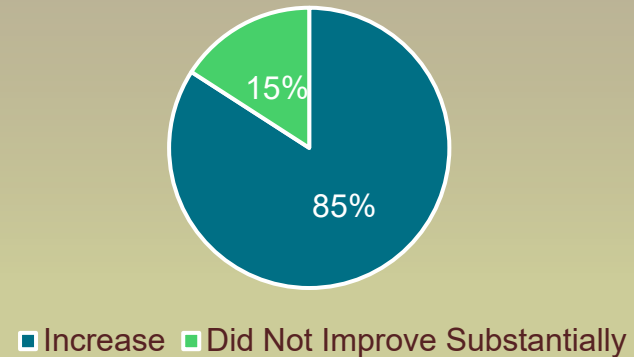
### Use of Respectful Language



### Support of Gender Expression



### Reconciliation of Values



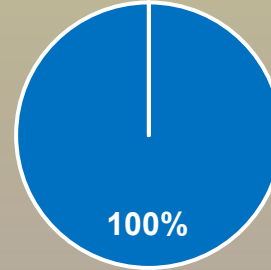
# Data from the Child and Adolescent Needs and Services Assessment (CANS) (2013-2018)

## Overall Functioning



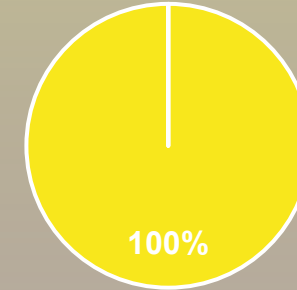
100% of youth served by YAP showed an increase in overall functioning

## Suicidal Gestures



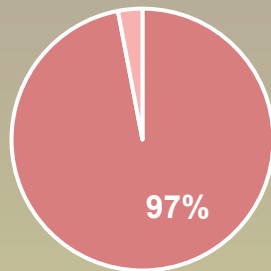
100% of youth who had suicidal gestures upon referral were no longer doing so at the end of YAP services

## Self-Harm



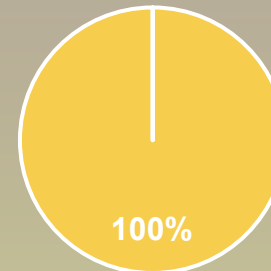
100% of youth who had been engaging in self-harm were no longer doing so at the end of YAP services

## Risky Sexual Behavior



97% of youth who had been engaging in risky sexual/dating behaviors showed a decrease in those behavior by the end of YAP services

## Schooling



100% of youth served by YAP continued school

# WHAT WE ARE SEEING

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Significant reduction in self-harm & suicide.

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Significant decrease in run-away.

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Youth are feeling affirmed and supported by their families.

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Families/caregivers are feeling supported.

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Keeping children and their families together.

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Reunification of families.

# YAP SERVICES

- Family Builders provides direct services to 7 counties in the Bay Area in California. We also provide the YAP training and consultation model to jurisdictions outside the Bay Area to implement this program in their communities. As part of the Federal Quality Improvement Center, we were evaluated in other jurisdictions. We are currently in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and two sites in Missouri.
- Through our intensive multi-day training, clinicians/social workers learn to deliver trauma informed LGBTQ competent services, seeped in cultural humility to families of LGBTQ+ youth. The training is followed by ongoing bi-monthly follow up coaching/consultation. We are continuing our evaluation through Ceres Policy Research.



# Q & A

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